

Israel: Past, Present, and Future #13

Joshua 21:43-45

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A promise that God makes to His people is not ended just because He keeps His promise on a specific occasion. If there is no time stamp on a promise, we should expect it to continue until God Himself clearly ends it.

For example, if God promises that He will supply all our need according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus (Philippians 4:19), does that promise end once God supplies our need on one particular occasion? Of course not! That promise has no time stamp upon it. If God promises to give us wisdom if we ask in faith (James 1:5), should we think His promise is finished once He gives us wisdom in a specific situation? Of course not!

If God promised to Abraham and his seed in an “everlasting covenant” (Genesis 17:7) to give a land as an “everlasting possession” (Genesis 17:8), should we think that God’s promise is ended and no longer applies because He brought Israel into possession of the land at some point in history? I would say no because there was no time stamp for it to end (“an everlasting possession”). Where Scripture makes clear that a promise has come to an end, we have warrant not to expect it to be repeated (e.g. the promise of Messiah coming to die for His people in Isaiah 53—He came once to die according to Hebrews 9:28), but where Scripture places no time stamp on a promise, neither should we.

God’s promises are gracious treasures given to God’s people, and we must neither presume upon them (as if we need not trust in the Lord to receive them) nor cast them away (when the Lord has not done so).

We continue today to consider three final Objections offered against the land yet being a promise to be realized in the future to a converted Israel.

I. Objection: Scripture tells us that the promise of the land to Abraham and his seed was realized at the time of Joshua. Thus, there is no future promise of the land to be realized (Joshua 21:43-45).

A. These verses are looking back from Joshua roughly 500 hundred years to the time that God called Abraham and made a gracious and “everlasting covenant” with him to be His God.

1. The Lord promised to make Abraham the father of many nations, to bless all nations through his Seed (Jesus), and to give him and his posterity the Promise Land as an “everlasting possession”.
2. That promise of the land continued after Abraham, to Isaac, to Jacob, while the 12 tribes were in Egyptian bondage, after they were delivered from Egypt by God’s great power through Moses, and during the 40 years that they wandered in the wilderness. Israel then saw God’s promise of the land realized under Joshua as Israel battled the Canaanite nations for about 7 years and defeated them.
3. After 500 years Israel possessed the Promise Land as God had promised to Abraham.

B. The Lord was ever faithful to His promise even if it was hundreds of years in coming to pass. Even the sins and weaknesses of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Moses—even the rebellion of Israel in the wilderness, did not end the promise of God. Israel’s rebellion delayed God’s promise for 40 years while God was separating the wheat from the chaff in bringing forth a new faithful generation to inherit the promise, but God kept His promise as He always does and must do, because it is impossible for God to lie or to be unfaithful to His promise. God’s faithfulness to keep His promise is celebrated in Psalm 105:8-11.

C. There is no question that God kept His promise made to Abraham and his seed in giving to Israel the Promise Land at that time of Joshua—Joshua 21:43,45. The question that yet remains is this: Did

God's promise of the land to Israel end once they possessed it under Joshua or did God's promise continue thereafter? Let us briefly survey Scripture.

1. **Deuteronomy 30:1-5,19-20.** Even before Israel actually came into possession of the Promise Land, Moses warned them that the blessing of dwelling in the Promise Land in peace and safety would be realized through faith in the Lord and obedience to God's commandments. In other words, God made the promise to Israel as an "everlasting possession", but this blessed promise would only be enjoyed through faith and obedience. The inspired words of Moses here become a paradigm of Israel's history—safety and peace in the Promise Land when Israel trusted and obeyed the Lord—war, famine, pestilence, and dispersion from the Promise Land when Israel rebelled against the Lord. Just because Israel was dispersed from the Promise Land and led into captivity does not mean that God's promise of the land had ceased.

2. **1 Kings 8:56.** Solomon's prayer (about 500 years after Joshua) is very much following the words of Moses in Deuteronomy 30—the promise of God will be realized in the faith and obedience of God's people. Though God kept His promise in giving Israel the Promise Land at the time of Joshua, yet the promise of the land did not end there, but likewise continued until the time of Solomon (1 Kings 4:24). Well then, did the promise of the land continue after Solomon (even though Solomon clearly stated that God kept His promise to Israel)? Absolutely, as we shall see.

3. **2 Chronicles 20:7.** King Jehoshaphat's prayer for God's protection against a massive enemy army is about 100 years after Solomon's prayer, and he is repeating the promise made to Abraham ("for ever"). The promise of the land had not ended at that time.

4. **Jeremiah 7:3-7** (about 250 years after the King Jehoshaphat). The Lord says through Jeremiah that if Judah is faithful to the Lord that she will continue to see the everlasting promise of the land made to Abraham realized ("for ever and ever" before captivity).

5. **Jeremiah 11:1-5** ("as it is this day" before the Babylonian captivity)

6. **Ezekiel 28:25-26** (during the Babylon captivity, a short time after Jeremiah).

7. **Ezekiel 37:21-25** (during the Messianic age the promise of the land continues).

D. Thus, the promise of the land given by the Lord to Abraham and his seed was realized at the time of Joshua, but it was a promise that continued to be realized when Israel was faithful to the Lord. I submit that God's promise is not presently being realized in the unbelieving nation of Israel (they are Christ's enemies, Romans 11:28), but it will be realized again in the future (Ezekiel 37:21-25; Zechariah 12-14; Zechariah 2:10-12; Isaiah 19; Jeremiah 23:5-8).

II. Objection: The Promise Land is part of the Ceremonial Law of the Old Testament, and, therefore, the promise of land to Israel has ceased along with a restored temple, priesthood, ceremonies, and holy days.

A. The earthly Promise Land was a **type** of the heavenly Promise Land to which Abraham by faith looked to inherit (Hebrews 11:9-10,16). As long as the promise of the earthly Promise Land to a converted Israel continues (as we have seen it does), then it continues to be a type of the heavenly Promise Land.

B. The promise made by God to Abraham of the land as an "everlasting possession" occurred some 400+ years before God instituted the Ceremonial Law. Paul argues that the law does not cancel the promise made to Abraham (Galatians 3:17). Thus, the promise of the Land was not ceremonial—it is national. The promise of the Land was not nailed to the cross of Christ as was the Ceremonial Law (Colossians 2:14).

III. Objection: The promise of the land to Israel is never explicitly mentioned in the New Testament. That means the promise of the land to Israel no longer applies to them.

A. Does God have to repeat a promise from the Old Testament in the New Testament for that promise to continue?

1. What about the promise of blessing to the nation of Egypt in the days of the Messiah (Isaiah 19)? It's inferred by good and necessary deduction (Romans 11:25)—so is the promise to Israel (Romans 11:26).

2. What about the promise made to those who keep the Second Commandment (Exodus 20:4-6). Is this promise repeated?

B. The promise of Israel's national conversion to Christ and restoration of the Promise Land is prophesied to come in the Messianic age (between the First and Second Comings of Christ) in various places (Zechariah 12-14; Zechariah 2:10-12; Isaiah 19; Jeremiah 23:5-8).

1. These prophecies are grounded in the promise made to Abraham in the "everlasting covenant", and in it is promised the land as an "everlasting possession" (Genesis 17:7-8) which is repeated at different times of Israel's history (as we have seen). Paul says the "gifts" (which includes the promise of the land to Abraham and his posterity) and "calling" of God to Israel as a nation are irrevocable (Romans 11:29).

2. God's silence in the New Testament is not an absolute silence. The passages we have considered from the New Testament (Romans 11; Matthew 23:39; Acts 1:6-7; 2 Corinthians 3:14-16) infer there is coming a national conversion and a national restoration of the land to Israel in peace and safety.

3. Rather than silence in the New Testament being a denial of the restoration of the earthly Promise Land to Israel, I submit it is rather a confirmation of it. In a promise made and confirmed by the Lord many times in the Old Testament, silence in the New Testament implies consent/agreement/continuation of the promise, not discontinuation (marital promises, promise to reward a child for work done, etc.). God's promise of the "everlasting covenant" and of an "everlasting possession" of the land is not ceremonial or ecclesiastical, but is national.

4. God doesn't need to repeat the promise of the land if it is an "everlasting" gift to Israel as a nation. Rather than believing that unless God repeats the promise of the land to a converted Israel in the New Testament there is no future promise to be realized, we ought to believe just the opposite, that unless God revokes the promise of the land to a converted Israel (which Paul says God cannot do in Romans 11:29), there yet remains a future promise of the land to be realized to a converted Israel.

IV. Application

A. God's delay in keeping His promise is not a failure to keep His promise. At least 25 long years elapsed between God's first promise to Abraham and the birth of Isaac. About 400 years were to be spent by the chosen seed in bondage in Egypt before Israel possessed the Promise Land. Even after the deliverance from Egypt, Israel spent 40 years wandering in the wilderness—from a human perspective, it was one delay after another—waiting and more waiting. Yet God was faithful all the time (Habakkuk 2:3). Delays are God's appointments to stretch and exercise our faith in the promise of God (walking by faith not sight). If we are preoccupied with the delay and our present circumstances rather than trusting in the promise of God and waiting upon Him, we will sinfully resort to human means as did Abraham (God answers prayer with "Yes", "No", or "Wait"—but He always answers prayer and His promise is that He always gives us what is good for us, Matthew 6:33; Matthew 7:11).

B. All God's promises in Christ are "Yea" and "Amen" (2 Corinthians 1:20). But that doesn't mean that we can live in rebellion against the Lord and expect to reap the blessings of His promises any more than Israel could expect God's blessings while living in disobedience. God's promises are for us to cling to by faith, not by presumption, not by naming it and claiming it, and not by our baptism. It is not the strength of our faith (mustard seed), but the object of our faith.

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